

No link found between autism and celiac disease

Contrary to previous studies, autistic children are no more likely than other children to have celiac disease, according to new research that will be presented at the American Academy of Neurology's 59th Annual Meeting in Boston, April 28 – May 5, 2007.

Researchers compared blood samples of 34 children with autism to samples of 34 children without autism who had been referred to an outpatient clinic of the same hospital. They looked for two antibodies used to help detect celiac disease—anti-gliadin antibodies and anti-endomysial antibodies. Biopsies of the small intestine were offered to children who tested positive for either antibody to confirm the diagnosis. Each group contained 18 boys and 16 girls between the ages of four and 16.

The study found autistic children were no more likely than children without autism to develop celiac disease. Anti-gliadin antibodies were found in four children with autism and two without autism. Biopsies on all six children came back negative for celiac disease.

"This study shows food allergies often associated with autism may have no connection to the gluten intolerance experienced by people with celiac disease," said study author Samra Vazirian, MD, with Tehran University of Medical Sciences in Tehran, Iran.

Autism is a developmental disability that impairs social interaction and communication. People with autism often experience food sensitivities, particularly to certain grains. Celiac disease is a disorder that can damage the intestines when gluten, which is found in many grains, is ingested.

The study also found no link between the level of antibodies and the severity of autism.

"Further research to determine the relationship between the levels of these antibodies in autistic children and the severity of autism would be beneficial," said Vazirian.

Source: American Academy of Neurology

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